

A PLAY FOR PRESENT TIMES

IN ONE ACT

By CYRIL WENTWORTH HOGG

SIXPENCE NET

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THE STORY
OF CORPORAL BELL

THE RECRUIT

6d. net.

A PLAY OF THE MOMENT.

IN ONE ACT.

MRS. VENABLES.

MINNIE SMITH, *her married daughter.*

PEGGY, *her unmarried daughter.*

TOM BELL.

THE STORY OF CORPORAL BELL

A PLAY FOR PRESENT
TIMES

IN ONE ACT

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THE STORY OF CORPORAL BELL

The characters are :—

CYNTHIA

MARTHA

PEGGY

.

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THE STORY OF CORPORAL BELL

A top flat in Kensington occupied by CYNTHIA and MARTHA. The scene is a living-room. In the centre, at the back, is a door leading to a tiny hall. Another door on the right of the stage leads to other rooms. Facing this, that is on the left of the stage, is the fire-place. A table stands in the right centre part of the room, down stage. There are chairs, a bookcase filled with books and the usual furniture. The room is bright and pleasant. Early evening in May, 1915.

CYNTHIA, a pretty girl of twenty, is occupied at the table with the design of a fashion plate. Over her dress she wears a long blue apron, bearing many a stain of paint. A postman's knock is heard. She rises, wiping her hands, and goes from the room, returning quickly with a letter which she opens and reads. The letter causes many exclamations—an "Oh!" an "Ah!" a "Well, I——" and a "What shall I——"

MARTHA comes in. MARTHA is not prepossessing. Some few years older, she is in marked contrast to CYNTHIA'S neatness. MARTHA is, in fact, very slovenly. In addition she wears black-rimmed spectacles which make looks more hopeless. But she is certainly not grotesque and her voice is really charming. She has a pen in her ear, a cigarette in her lips and an empty photograph frame in her hand. The back of the frame is in her other hand so that it is easily seen the frame is empty.

MARTHA. Old thing, couldn't you bear me on your dressing table any longer? Pitched me out of the window, did you?

(CYNTHIA *has collapsed into a chair, the hand holding the letter limply hanging down so that MARTHA doesn't see it.*)

CYNTHIA. Don't worry me now, Martha.

MARTHA (*now sitting*). It's to be hoped I've been picked up by a bright young man, a religious young man, a young man appreciative of the great possession he has come into.

CYNTHIA. No—no. Of course I didn't throw it out of the window. Whyever d'you want to pry about in my bedroom?

MARTHA. I only went searching for myself. They commence my new serial on Monday and they ask for a photograph of the authoress for Saturday's issue.

CYNTHIA. As if they could print such a terrible thing of you as that! It's a mercy you didn't find it.

MARTHA. Pardon me, it's more like me than any photo I ever had. And it's an axiom that women who write the best serials are hideous. If Saturday's readers found something fluffy and saucy grinning up at them, their minds would be made up the serial was going to be rotten and they'd never get busy on it.

CYNTHIA. I haven't got the photograph, Martha, I haven't any idea where it is, and I haven't any intention of looking for it and do leave me alone, there's a sweet woman.

MARTHA (*jumping up*). Righto! So veiled a hint is not lost on me, my lady. (*She goes towards the door.*) They do without it. That's that. (*She takes the pen from her ear and is about to open the door.*)

(*Before she gets out, an idea comes to CYNTHIA. She rises in a hurry.*)

CYNTHIA (*quickly*). Couldn't we get away for a few days? I'll pay fares. You can do the rest of

your chapters just as well in the country, and this stuff of mine may go in any time within a month.

MARTHA. Yesterday nothing on earth would induce you to take a holiday during the war.

CYNTHIA (*making the excuse with difficulty*). On reflection, I'm inclined to believe I was unwise.

MARTHA. No, I must be handy to correct my first week's proofs. When that's done, yes.

CYNTHIA. My dear, I want to go *now*—say within an hour or so. Let's shut the place up and bolt.

MARTHA (*coming towards her*). If you bolt, you bolt from something. Why should I bolt?

CYNTHIA. Well—from here. From the flat, of course.

MARTHA. Cynthia, have you got a love affair coming into action?

CYNTHIA. Talk sense—do! (CYNTHIA *emphasises "do" by shakes of the letter.*)

MARTHA. I've done that sudden want to bolt so often in my tales. You wouldn't like me to read that letter?

(CYNTHIA *is conscious she has betrayed herself, and put out at having done so, she goes to the fireplace and turns to MARTHA, after a moment's thought.*)

CYNTHIA. It's the last thing in the world I would like, but it's dawning upon me I shall have to let you.

(MARTHA *gets from her chair and coming over puts out her hand for the letter. CYNTHIA promptly sticks it behind her back.*)

CYNTHIA. Sit down there.

(MARTHA *sits down by the fireplace. There is a pause.*)

CYNTHIA (*hesitating*). To commence with—no, it doesn't commence there. (*A pause.*) Some weeks ago—(*She stops—then in a flood of words*) Oh, Martha, I'm in the most unspeakable, fiendish mess of my life. I'd give you to midnight and you wouldn't guess one jot of the ghastly fix I'm in.

(MARTHA gets up with words of alarm.)

CYNTHIA (*shrieking to stop her*). No, sit still. Once you begin sympathy I shall break down. (MARTHA sinks back into her chair—then CYNTHIA sits also.) Can't you start me off somehow——?

MARTHA (*weakly*). Once upon a time——

CYNTHIA. Thank you, dear. Yes. Accurately, it was a couple of months ago I took some drawing to the "World of Women" and the people in the office were having a whip round for cigarettes. Every one subscribing addressed a postcard so that the Tommy who got your packet would be able to write you his thanks. That's clear, isn't it?

MARTHA (*alarmed*). And your lot was so poisonous

CYNTHIA. Poisonous! I'll have you know that never in the ten years of a smoker's career was tobacco half so soothing, that every puff of smoke curled away into a vision of his benefactor in all the wealth of her wonderful girlhood, and each cigarette should cost Germany a corpse. He said so on the postcard.

MARTHA. Dear me!

CYNTHIA. And would I write to him? Letters were longed for and he had very few. What could I do but write?

MARTHA. Why, yes.

CYNTHIA. It's easy to say "yes." I do wish I'd had the strength to say "no."

MARTHA. But you didn't?

CYNTHIA. No. I wrote. Very difficult, of course, but I thought home life might appeal to him most. I told him about you and a little about me, about your writing and my design work, and then a little about both of us; how we preferred Lyons tea to Stores tea, and the fearful anxiety over the housekeeping money. It seemed to me a feeble lot of nonsense, but Martha, my dear, whatever wild ecstasy he had left from the cigarettes, he shed over my letter when he got it.

MARTHA (*glowing*). The nice chap.

CYNTHIA. He isn't nice—how can he be nice when he has lured me into such a pickle? Better for him to have stuck to the grocer's shop he came from than go getting himself made into a soldier just to catch poor me.

MARTHA. Catch you! Catch you?

CYNTHIA (*irritably*). You don't help me—I should have thought you could guess a great deal. Instead, I have to ladle it out word by word.

MARTHA. Really, Cynthia, I'm rather afraid to guess.

CYNTHIA. Well—wait a minute. I'll tell you this from where you can't see me. (*She goes up and stands behind MARTHA.*) He wanted love-letters. (*She pauses to see the effect on MARTHA, but MARTHA doesn't move.*) He actually asked me to write him love-letters. He made the excuse that all the others in his section got love-letters and getting none himself made him feel the cold more at night. (*She peers round to see how MARTHA takes this.*) Aren't you horrified?

MARTHA (*briskly*). Not a bit!

CYNTHIA (*coming to the front of her again*). Then you ought to be. Where the wretch was so abominable was next day he followed it up with how he'd had to stand in his trench four hours on end with ice-cold water up to his middle. Not even the tact, you understand, to call his waist his waist. What was I to do?

MARTHA. Sit down and write him yard after yard of what he asked for.

CYNTHIA (*who is now sitting*). Yes, imagine four hours! I've always been impressed with the delicacy Lord Lytton's lovers wrote to one another. The first few letters I borrowed from "Ernest Maltravers"—modernized them here and there, put in local points and they were very readable.

MARTHA. You mean to tell me you sent a man on active service chunks of Lord Lytton! May you be forgiven!

CYNTHIA. Oh, my good Martha, spare your sneers. They filled his soul, they warmed his poor body, they soothed and comforted—Heaven alone knows the few things they didn't do.

MARTHA. All that on a postcard too?

CYNTHIA. No, but I suppose the censor has made a note of the miracles Lord Lytton and I can manage. But don't make too much of Lord Lytton. I filched from every blessed book there (*she points to the book-case*) till three weeks ago I came to the end of them. And one night I was stumped, with a letter overdue.

MARTHA. If you'd only told me.

CYNTHIA. Don't interrupt. So I went into your room and found a God-sent thing, "The Love Letters of an Unfaithful Woman." Martha, you shouldn't leave books like that about, but I can't deny they have their uses.

MARTHA. Well, she's very much more to the point than Lord Lytton.

CYNTHIA. Exactly. What the unfaithful woman said through me brought the crisis right on me. Would you believe it, he sent his photograph and wanted mine?

MARTHA. Do let me see.

CYNTHIA (*hesitating*). Now I warn you, allowing for his showy clothes and the bits of luggage hanging so ripingly all over him, even then he's . . . distinctly good looking.

MARTHA (*relieved*). Ah! What encouragement to one's imagination.

(CYNTHIA goes to a drawer and brings out a photograph which she takes to MARTHA, who has risen to meet her.)

CYNTHIA. Corporal Tom Bell.

(MARTHA looks at the photograph a moment or two before replying.)

MARTHA. Fancy! The waste of that behind a grocer's counter. (*She props the photograph up against*

the clock. Still looking at it.) And what had he to say about your photograph?

CYNTHIA (*fidgeting*). Yes. Now we've come to the real mess.

MARTHA. Even if he said you were the prettiest girl in the country, you ought to be proud to tell me.

CYNTHIA (*having decided on a new line*). Martha, dear, why won't you take more notice of how you look?

MARTHA. Shut up.

CYNTHIA. But I'm not going to. You always give an idea you're not properly contained. There's loose hair roaming far from the top of your ear. All down the back you're highlands and lowlands. Your skirt has an opening top and bottom, one of which you just get into. And I'm sure you wear trick stays—once they're round you, they vanish.

MARTHA (*pleasantly*). What else?

CYNTHIA. Those painful goggles! Rimless pince-nez are neat and presentable. No, you rather fancy yourself as near to a slut as you can manage. And to crown all you're photographed in the rig out you roll about in all day.

MARTHA. Yes, I suppose at my time of life I ought to begin to think of my appearance. What has this to do with Corporal Bell?

CYNTHIA (*uncomfortable—making imaginary patterns on her skirt*). Well . . . when he asked for my photograph, I came to the conclusion . . . that I'd gone just about as far as was good for His Impertinence, and I . . . I . . . racked my brains for the best means to chuck it.

MARTHA (*very deliberately*). You don't meant to say you dropped writing after having seen what he was like?

CYNTHIA (*very deliberately*). No, the thorough way, you see, was to make *him* have no further wish to write to *me*. And . . . so I sent back. . . .

(*She stops dead and can't go on.*)

MARTHA (*after a pause*). What?

CYNTHIA. Why can't you use the brains you put into your serials and guess, Martha? It would be such a help.

MARTHA. Go on.

CYNTHIA (*forcing it out, loudly and quickly*). The abominable production of you that lived in that frame and said it was me. (*She is very relieved it is out.*)

MARTHA (*surprised, but not in the least annoyed*). You don't mean to tell me I'm as much a guy as that—a regular man-alarm?

CYNTHIA. My dear, you *make* yourself a guy.

MARTHA. Oh, I assure you the lesson shall not be lost on me. Most intelligent of you, Cynthia, I declare, but an atrocious act towards this darling thing. (*She flourishes the Corporal's photograph.*) I'm afraid your heart is stone.

CYNTHIA (*angrily*). Atrocious! Was it? I'm more involved than ever! He adores your homely expression—you're far beyond his stupid anticipation—page on page of utter slobber, sickening rot. Oh, you disappointing woman!

(*MARTHA now sits with a cheerful smile on her face.*)

(*Shaking her finger at MARTHA.*) But I got back on you. From then I kind of turned him over to you. The rest of my letters were unedited extracts from your worst serials.

MARTHA. With what result?

CYNTHIA (*mournfully—after a pause*). He liked them more than any he'd had. (*Craving in despair.*) And he's coming home on leave! Here, read it. (*She tosses the letter into MARTHA'S lap.*)

(*Having done so, CYNTHIA, while MARTHA reads the letter, paces about the room, talking.*)

There's no coping with the silly but to run right away from him. Pack your traps, Martha. I'll hide you from him, the marauder. Every moment you sit

swallowing his nonsense is a moment nearer danger.
(*She snatches the letter from MARTHA.*)

MARTHA (*very disappointed*). You might have let me finish it.

CYNTHIA. Aren't you alive to the peril you're in? Most likely he'll make a bee line for here.

(*MARTHA stands up.*)

MARTHA (*gazing at the Corporal's photograph*). Naturally.

CYNTHIA (*taking off her apron*). In half an hour at the latest, we must be starting—let that be definite!

MARTHA. Think of the disappointment as he rings and knocks and no one answers.

CYNTHIA (*washing the brushes*). Yes, I know. If I've called myself a fool once, I've done it a hundred times. Other people in the world have tried to be kind and made a muck of it. That's the best excuse I have.

(*MARTHA turns round to her and after a short silence.*)

MARTHA (*with firm decision*). You don't drag me off. When he comes, he shall find me.

CYNTHIA (*closing up the paint box and drying her brushes on a cloth—laughing*). Oh Martha, if I believed you such a hussy as that I couldn't live with you any more.

MARTHA (*placidly*). I mean it. I'm very interested.

CYNTHIA (*turning and looking at her—petulantly*). Now I've had enough to worry me as it is——

MARTHA. From this minute you're relieved of any further worry. (*She sits in the chair.*)

(*CYNTHIA crosses the room to her before speaking.*)

CYNTHIA. It's very clever of us, Martha, considering it was a great liberty to send your photograph as I did, it's very clever of us to have thrashed this out without getting at all angry. But I warn you we may start right in to the deuce of a row.

MARTHA (*simply*). Perhaps what I intend to do is very shameful. Nevertheless, there exists the case of a man who has written his praise of what I seem to him. When he comes away from the horrors out there, this will be the end of his journey. And at the end of his journey, shameful or not, he shall find me. That's all about it.

CYNTHIA. If you'd been doing the writing, there might be some excuse.

MARTHA. Don't forget it was *my* stuff that appealed most to him.

(There is another pause.)

CYNTHIA. Martha, I hope you won't think me spiteful, but listen. You make a great point of him not being disappointed. Very well. But there's more in your madness than that. Hateful of me to say so, I know, but I'm going to. The fact is, *you want* to meet the man.

MARTHA. Certainly I do. Heavens, d'you imagine I'm ashamed of the first signs of romance that have ever brightened my life? I revel in it, you prim child.

(There is a loud rat-tat-tat on the front door, followed by an extensive burr of the electric bell. The knock leaves them speechless and fixed at the attitude it caught them in. The ring causes a shock and then a further period of immobility. It is CYNTHIA who makes the first move. With a little shriek, she runs hurriedly from the room, saying as she runs.)

CYNTHIA. Don't you call for me—don't you dare—I refuse to see him. *(She is gone.)*

(MARTHA is rather at a loss at first. Then she places a chair in the middle of the fireplace and stands on it so that she can see herself in the overmantel. She vigorously goes for her skirt and shifts it round an inch or two—she wriggles and pulls at the back of her blouse—and she does what she can for her hair. The knock is repeated. She jumps from the chair and taking off

her spectacles lays them on the mantelpiece. Then, with some difficulty, for MARTHA is very short-sighted, she goes out into the hall, leaving the door wide open. You hear her open the front door.)

PEGGY (*whose voice is quick and sharp*). Evening.

MARTHA (*after a pause—in a very different tone*). Good evening.

PEGGY. Mind me coming in?

MARTHA. Oh do.

(There is another silence. PEGGY then appears in the doorway. PEGGY is dressed in quiet clothes of a good cut. She is a thin girl of a fair height. In her hand she carries a packet of letters. She comes to the middle of the room. MARTHA has followed her and makes her way over to the mantelpiece, bruising her shins against the chair on the way. She runs her fingers up and down the mantelpiece. She turns.)

MARTHA. Could you tell me whether my spectacles are on the mantelpiece? I'm very short-sighted.

(PEGGY comes over.)

PEGGY (*who now sees the photograph against the clock*). Just about tickle 'is fancy being stuck there, that would.

MARTHA. Eh?

PEGGY (*taking the spectacles, which were propped against the clock, and handing them to MARTHA*). A young lady named Miss Cynthia Hammond's cause of me looking in. (*MARTHA has now put on her spectacles.*) O' course, you yourself—never struck me who you was till you put them on. (*On the top of her papers is the missing photograph that went to CORPORAL BELL. She shows it to MARTHA.*)

MARTHA (*who is most amazed*). May I ask how you come to have this photograph?

PEGGY. I'll tell the tale, never you fear—all in 'igh time. (*She sits down.*) My name's Peggy. I'm

maid to Lady Tibby Veavey—dress her to look right, you know, not sweepin' an' dustin.'

(MARTHA is most uncomfortable.)

MARTHA. Would you excuse me while I call my friend in? (*She moves to do so.*)

PEGGY. The writing one? Just how you fancy, but you don't tell me she knows what you've been saying in these letters surely! (*She holds out the pile of letters.*)

(MARTHA goes to her quickly with an "Oh!" and takes the letters. CYNTHIA, obviously listening outside the other door, bursts into the room, speaking at once.)

CYNTHIA (*horrified*). He's dead and they were in his kit they've sent back!

(PEGGY is startled by the intrusion.)

PEGGY (*after a moment*). No, he's not dead, bless yer. Very alive'o, take it from me. Mind the draught from that keyhole don't give you the earache.

CYNTHIA (*flurried*). Whatever excuse you have for these letters being in your possession you've no business to carry them about loosely. You might drop one.

PEGGY. Nothing to blush for in them if I 'ad. They've drawn a tear or two from me more'n once. What odds.

CYNTHIA (*to MARTHA—very annoyed*). She's read them, if you please.

PEGGY. I've read them. Forty-nine—one more'd 'ave made the half hundred.

CYNTHIA. Oh! (*She snatches the packet from MARTHA and holds it behind her back.*)

MARTHA (*to CYNTHIA*). I don't mind her having read them, dear.

PEGGY (*to CYNTHIA*). If she don't mind, you turnin' so acid's being a bit lavish with yourself.

CYNTHIA. But they weren't meant for you.

PEGGY (*rocking her head from side to side—casually*).
P'r'aps not. That's as may be.

MARTHA (*to PEGGY*). Is anything to be gained by this mystery? Can't you tell us straight out what you have to?

PEGGY. Now haven't I been wantin' to hard enough? Both of you clucking away like hens, who's 'ad half a chance.

MARTHA. Do go on.

PEGGY. First an' foremost let me tell you he's (*she points at the photograph of the Corporal*) as cunning a rascal as ever was.

MARTHA (*emphatically*). I'm sure he's not.

PEGGY. Isn't he? You listen to this. There's a young woman he's had 'is eye over many a long day.

(*MARTHA is about to say something, but CYNTHIA grabs her arm.*)

On the tip of being married they was, matter of that she'd left the place she was in even. An' out he blurts with he's off to join. She was tired, I give you my word.

MARTHA. Because he'd joined? What a girl!

(*CYNTHIA goes and sits at the table and runs through the packet of letters.*)

PEGGY. No, not by reason of 'im joining, thank you. Glad an' proud 'e had, she was. On account of what was in 'is silly mind. He wanted too much joining, yer see. An' not the 'appiest of tempers 'as this young woman. Gets the needle at anything not 'appening according to what she's set her wits on.

CYNTHIA (*rising and coming towards them*). Why is it the address is cut off the top of every letter?

PEGGY (*very huffy*). You see you kep' at me to get along and when I do——

CYNTHIA (*with a sigh*). All right. I won't butt in again. I'm sorry.

PEGGY. No offence.

MARTHA (*prompting—eagerly*). We'd reached where she got the needle——

PEGGY. Yes, as I was telling you, what Tom Bell got daft on was they was to be married straight off and she was to go living with 'is old mother while he was out o' England so as to save the money of two 'ouseholds. That's what he said, but twig the sly boots? (*Emphatically.*) Some one to keep a eye against 'er getting into mischief. Precious lot of good the love she 'ad was to him if that was 'is feelings. And a nasty how d'you do and 'igh words came of it, him making out nothing of the sort ever come into his mind.

CYNTHIA. Wouldn't it be much simpler if you stopped trying to make us think there was any other girl but you?

PEGGY (*after a sharp look at CYNTHIA*). The same to me 'owever you have it.

MARTHA (*who is always taken in*). You! Oh, I'm afraid you've been a great trial to him!

PEGGY (*snappily*). Anyhow you don't catch me living with his old mother. My mother never grew to abide me, let alone his.

MARTHA. But you resigned yourself to what he wished before he left—of course you did.

(PEGGY *stands up.*)

PEGGY. Did I? No fear. Back I went to Lady Tibby soon as winking and let Tom go to do his bit with a good big flea to bite his ear.

MARTHA (*tearfully*). Oh, you cruel girl—how could you?

PEGGY. You've not seen me enough. I'm that stubborn you'd never guess. Once my mind's stuck on a thing, old Nick don't budge it. It's awful being like that, sort of tears you inside out, knowing the whole while you're wrong and can't make your beastly self say ditto. Just you fancy the 'orrid pains I'd

'ave each time his letter come and me not going to take no notice.

CYNTHIA (*quickly*). He was still sending you letters while he was writing here?

PEGGY. If I'd not 'ad his letters reg'lar enough I'd 've soon busied myself into knowin' why. The stoopid goat 'adn't the brains to see that was how to bring me round.

CYNTHIA (*definitely*). Instead of which——

PEGGY. 'Stead of which it gets into his great 'ollow head I'd give in quick enough if another young lady was concerned in 'im. Soon as ever her (*referring to MARTHA*) loving words were in 'is wicked 'ands, he clips the address off so's I can't 've come here and posts it to me.

(*MARTHA sinks into a chair with a little cry.* CYNTHIA *is very cross.*)

CYNTHIA. My goodness—did one ever——!

PEGGY. The two last—since the photo—was what did it. (*Near MARTHA.*) Must be a rare treat being able to write like that. Though you ought to be ashamed of yourself, carryin' on in that fashion with a man you'd never clapped eyes on. (*To CYNTHIA.*) You'd never put down what she can though yours is in print in the paper.

CYNTHIA. No, I suppose not.

PEGGY (*to MARTHA*). Seemed to me more of them an' he'd never stand it no longer, and where'd I've been? What was I to do but write and tell 'im to try for leave off?

MARTHA. Ah, I'm glad you did that.

PEGGY. Way I look at it's this. He's the pick of all men and he's fighting on the side that God's picked. A pretty good go-off for a girl I reckon.

MARTHA (*genuinely*). When you see him promise to make up for the trouble you've been.

(*PEGGY smiles before she answers.*)

PEGGY. I was married this morning to Corporal Tom Bell. He's waiting in the street below. We've only three days for our honeymoon before he's due back.

(CYNTHIA *is at once softened.*)

CYNTHIA (*with real feeling*). Oh you poor, poor dear! I am disgusted with myself for being cross to you.

MARTHA (*distressed*). The idea of keeping him loitering about the street!

PEGGY. Both of us knew you'd to be thanked for what's took place. As for him, the cowardly custard that ought to be thankin' you too, the trenches is play-time to stepping inside here. That's what he said, so o' course it 'ad to be me. And if it's the same to you I'd like the photo back for keeps. (*She picks up MARTHA's photograph from the table.*)

MARTHA. It's so kind of you to want to have it.

PEGGY (*with a sigh*). Well, that's all. Good evening.

MARTHA. Good-bye. (*She takes up PEGGY's hand in both her own and presses it warmly.*)

CYNTHIA (*on the other side of PEGGY*). Good luck is what I say, Mrs. Bell.

(MARTHA goes and opens the door, and leaving it open, steps into the hall and is heard opening the front door. This happens while the following sentences are spoken.)

PEGGY (*chuckling*). Mrs. Bell! Mrs. Bell! Take me awhile gettin' into the knack of that, no mistake.

CYNTHIA. I'm sure you're just the type to be a soldier's wife. No snivelling and fuss when he goes back, whatever you suffer. I don't wonder he thought you were worth his tricks.

(MARTHA comes back.)

MARTHA (*still distressed*). Do hurry—think how sick he'll be of hanging about!

(PEGGY turns. She pauses a moment before MARTHA.)

PEGGY. Thank you again, Miss.

(MARTHA ushers her out. CYNTHIA stands a moment—then she hastily takes out her handkerchief and wipes away a tear. The door is heard to close. She turns to the mantelpiece and blows her nose. MARTHA comes back with a little can of milk. She glances at CYNTHIA'S back as she comes down to the table, where she puts the milk.)

MARTHA. The milk's come. I'll make the coffee.

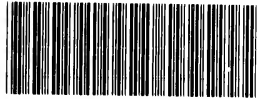
(CYNTHIA does neither answer nor move, but continues to dab her nose. MARTHA comes slowly over to her.)

MARTHA (*penitently*). Cynthia, I suppose one ought to feel dreadfully disgraced.

CYNTHIA (*swinging round—her eyes red*). Disgraced! You creature! It's the most edifying affair you've ever had a share in.

MARTHA (*with great enthusiasm*). That's just what I think too, dear!

(*She kisses CYNTHIA heartily.*)



The Latest A

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